

*“Arise, shine; for your light has come, . . .”*

The prophet Isaiah exhorts us. *“Arise, shine; for your light has come, . . .”* The light of which the prophet speaks is none other than the epiphany of our gracious God in the birth of Jesus Christ.

The birth, life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ changed our understanding of God. St. John writes, *“The law indeed was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.”* (John 1:17)

We confess and believe that in Jesus Christ the word of God became a living, breathing human being. In Jesus Christ the face and mind of God is revealed to all who believe in him.

This means that the Word of God is certainly much more than written words on a page. The Word of God is a living word which seeks to shape our understanding of God, the creation and God's will for our lives. Therefore, as students of the scriptures we must not only read and study the Word of God but also look to the living Christ, praying that the Spirit of Christ will enable us to discern God's will.

The will of God continues to be revealed to us. I give thanks to God that, sometimes, the church actually listens to God's revealing will. For example, there was a time when the church tolerated slavery – but the time came when individuals rose up in the church who recognized that slavery is not of God. They became leaders in the movement to abolish slavery!

More recently there was a time when women, who felt called by God to the ordained ministry, were told that women should be silent in the church. But the time came when the church realized this was not the will of God.

It is incumbent upon the church, in every age, not only to study the scriptures, but also to allow the living Christ to lead the church to discern God's will and to be obedient to God's will.

We need to remember, however, that discerning the will of God and being obedient to God's will led to the death of Jesus. Because Jesus focused his ministry on those texts in scripture which breathed love, compassion and tolerance, people who studied the Bible closely and devoted their lives to living according its teaching, rejected Jesus and accused him before Pilate. They were simply doing what scripture demanded of them.

Jesus knew the scriptures. Jesus was well aware that when he defended his disciples for plucking grain on the Sabbath, that God had instructed Moses to stone to death the man who gathered sticks on the Sabbath. Jesus also knew that tax collectors, prostitutes, and Gentiles were "unclean" according to the Bible, yet he welcomed them, touched them and ate with them.

From Jesus we learn that simply following Biblical precepts is not enough nor does it make us followers of Jesus. In and through Christ we receive the power to become the children of God. Therefore, we look to Jesus, the Living Word. – to what Jesus said and did in his lifetime to help us understand God's will for us and our creation.

Jesus Christ is: "The true light, which enlightens everyone . . ." (John 1:9). I pray that the light of the living Christ will continue to shine brightly in this world through us this new year and always!

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